MASAKA

Land encroachment derails Masaka hospital expansion

By Dismus Buregyeya

More than 200 locals accused of encroaching on 49 acres belonging to Masaka Regional Referral Hospital have disrupted key infrastructure expansion projects at the health facility.

Projects affected include the planned construction of a regional blood bank, heart institute, staff houses and other developments under the hospital's five-year development programme.

New Vision has learnt that the land dispute has been worsened by an ownership wrangle involving Buganda Land Board (BLB) and the Government.

Some families occupying the land claim they acquired it through the Buganda Kingdom's "*Kyapa Mungalo*" programme.

Sources at the Masaka Zonal Land Office, who preferred anonymity, said they had earlier warned BLB officials in Masaka against interfering with the hospital land, but their concerns were ignored.

The hospital, originally constructed in 1979, is already grappling with ageing and dilapidated structures, making expansion urgent.



Officials display an architectural design of the senior staff hostel planned to be constructed at the hospital. The project has stalled due to land encroachment

Masaka resident city commissioner Ahmed Washaki confirmed that the matter had been brought to his attention and said plans were underway for stakeholders to meet with the district security committee.

Some Masaka city leaders have suggested that the Government compensates families that have settled on the land.

The dispute is not new. In 2016, the then state minister for health (general duties), Sarah Opendi, disagreed with former Masaka city mayor Godfrey Kayemba Afaayo over proposals to compensate squatters before eviction.

At the time, nearly 100 families had been served notices to vacate the land. Opendi insisted that the families leave to pave way for hospital expansion.

The hospital was then facing a shortage of land needed to support Masaka School of Comprehensive Nursing's linkage with Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

The facility later secured two acres to construct Equator University of Sciences, a new maternity ward, mortuary, cemetery and an incinerator.

Opendi rejected compensation proposals, saying: "All government land will be stolen if we start sympathising with people who deliberately encroach on institutional land targeting compensation."

However, Kayemba said the issue had been presented to President Yoweri Museveni.

"Museveni advised us that we compile a list of the affected families, evaluate their properties as the Government looks for money to compensate them under the land fund," he said.

Some affected families told *New Vision* that they acquired plots with the consent of the BLB and area local chairpersons.

Opendi blamed corruption for the controversy, alleging that some hospital staff and other officials were involved in selling hospital land.

The affected families, led by their association chairperson Gerald Sabiiti, have vowed to resist eviction unless compensated.

Former hospital senior administrator Elijah Mugisha said State House had intervened and consultations with the Attorney General were ongoing.

He revealed that 72 families had constructed houses on the land, while 83 families were registered as *bibanja* occupants.

Mugisha said: "It's the BLB that has brought confusion here. They went ahead and gave out certificates of occupancy to some of the people encroaching on Masaka hospital land.

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